

**MANDATORY REFERRAL REPORT NO. 12-01**  
**Proposed Acquisition of Property to Serve as Utilities North Mecklenburg Maintenance Facility**

**PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:**

Charlotte Mecklenburg Utilities Department (CMU) proposes to acquire property at 11609 Hord Drive (parcel # 01120123) in the Town of Huntersville to be used by CMU for a maintenance facility to serve the northern portion of Mecklenburg County. It is also possible that Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) may have use for a portion of the site for a vehicle maintenance and staging facility. In addition, Charlotte Business Support Services (BSS) may also have use for a portion of the facility to serve as a satellite vehicle maintenance facility for several departments (including Charlotte Area Transit System, CMU, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police).

The property is located in the NorthChar Business Park off Ramah Church Road and the surrounding uses are primarily industrial, rural residential and commercial land uses. The Town of Huntersville reports that both Seagle Street and Hord Drive (that provide vehicular access to the subject property) are privately-owned and maintained roads. The rail corridor for the Norfolk-Southern "O" line (lightly used for freight and proposed as the CATS Red Line commuter rail) passes across the western segment of the site.

The 10.01-acre property is currently improved as a warehouse and distribution facility (79,210 square feet of buildings consisting of 8,595 square feet of office space, 53,791 square feet of warehouse space and 16,824 square feet of covered storage space) and related parking/vehicle storage. The property was most recently used by a building material supplier as a sales office, warehouse and distribution facility. The property is zoned SP, Special Purpose District by the Town of Huntersville and the proposed use is consistent with current zoning.

**PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:**

The current North Maintenance CMU maintenance facility is located at 11235 Sam Furr Road in leased space that is shared with the property's owner. The proposed new location provides a more secured location, better parking for both CMU vehicles and employees' vehicles, as well as office space for related functions.

CMU has four Zone Operations Centers throughout Mecklenburg County for personnel and equipment for maintenance of the water and sewer systems. The North Zone is currently the only facility whose Operations Center is currently leased. Purchase of this location can meet the goal of having all facilities owned. CMU has considered a number of sites for a permanent location for the North Zone and has been seeking a site for approximately seven years. This is the first property considered that meets the site criteria for acreage, location, accessibility to service area, parking (for the public, CMU employees, and fleet vehicles), zoning, access, and acquisition cost. This location provides numerous advantages including adequate and secured parking, a separate public parking area, office space, warehouse facilities, and covered storage. The facility should be able to meet CMU's needs for many years into the future.

The potential also exists for the facility to function as a CMS bus servicing/staging/storage area for the northern segment of the County. Several transportation and facilities studies (some dating from as far back as the early 1990's) have identified the need to de-centralize CMS bus facilities operations and to establish a network of satellites. It might also be possible for at least some of the fleet maintenance functions (e.g. personnel, equipment, parts & supplies) to be shared between CMU and CMS. While specific CMS functions that would ultimately be housed at this location have not been clearly identified, significant potential for on-going dialogue between the two agencies exists. If such a joint use arrangement can be developed, CMS would likely lease one of the buildings on the site and a portion of the parking area.

Finally, BSS has identified this as a preferred site on which to locate a maintenance facility for City-owned vehicles that serve the northern portion of the County (in addition to the possibility of those owned by Huntersville and Davidson). This could potentially replace a current facility located on 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Charlotte, and if 12<sup>th</sup> Street operation be moved to this location, it would operate as a joint City-County facility (as does the 12<sup>th</sup> Street facility).

The property has a rail spur with access to the Norfolk Southern "O" line and adjacent to the future LYNX "Red Line" for commuter rail. The proposed operations would not have need for this spur (although properties in the NorthChar park further to the east may someday benefit from rail access).

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:**

Policies and criteria governing placement of the various facilities are contained in the "Project Justification" narrative above. Additionally, for CMU, priority is given to owning (as opposed to leasing) facilities as it is generally more cost effective over time.

The proposed uses are consistent with the existing zoning on the property. According to the Town of Huntersville Planning Department the SP zoning allows uses such as contractor offices and accessory storage yards as "permitted uses", so that the proposed CMU and CMS uses would be allowed to occupy the facilities without re-zoning or special approvals (so long as improvements are internal). If additional external or site improvements are involved, a Commercial Site Plan would be required.

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:**

The subject property does not fall into any of the Town of Huntersville's area plan geographies. The Zoning Ordinance therefore suffices to serve as policy guidance for future land uses (as mentioned, the proposed use is consistent with current site zoning). Although the future Red Line commuter service passes immediately to the west of the property, proposed passenger transit stations are located at least a mile away (the site is approximately a mile north of the proposed Huntersville station and two miles south of the proposed Sam Furr station), therefore the site is unaffected by transit station area plans.

The site is however impacted by two future thoroughfares identified in the Mecklenburg-Union MPO Thoroughfare Plan: the east/west Stumptown Road extension (that skirts the northern edge of the site) and the Church Street extension (also called Seagle Street extension) that crosses the site north/south. (Both of these projects are unfunded at this time.)

The Huntersville Town Board has also endorsed the concept of integrating the "Red Line Trail" into capital and land use planning in Huntersville (including recommending that it be integrated into the region's Comprehensive Transportation Plan). This trail is envisioned to run parallel to the Red Line between Center City Charlotte and Mt. Mourne in south Iredell County. While a precise alignment has not yet been identified, current thinking of Town staff is that at this location it should run within the future Church Street/Seagle Street right-of-way.

**PROJECT IMPACT:**

Inasmuch as the proposed use is categorically the same as the previous use of the property, no real impacts on the site and the surrounding area are anticipated.

**RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:**

The CATS North Corridor Red Line passes immediately west of the site (on the Norfolk Southern "O" line railbed). The line would become operational no sooner than 2017. While the railroad has no dedicated right-of-way, the "prescriptive easement" in which the rail is located does encroach (by as much as 100 feet) upon the western edge of the site.

Currently, municipal and county governments through which the proposed commuter line passes are evaluating a business model and financing plan intended to fund the local share of this project. One element of the financing plan is the proposed establishment of a series of "freight-oriented development" districts along the line, and this property (and the remainder of the NorthChar business park) falls within one of these proposed districts. The prospect of attracting new business to the business park that could capitalize on access to enhanced rail service could be crucial to the financial success of the Red Line.

**ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:**

The property would be acquired by the end of April 2012 and Utilities would move in around June 2012.

**JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:**

The Joint Use Task Force discussed this matter at their February 1, 2012 meeting. The point was made that accommodations should be considered for the future Red Line Trail in future use of the site.

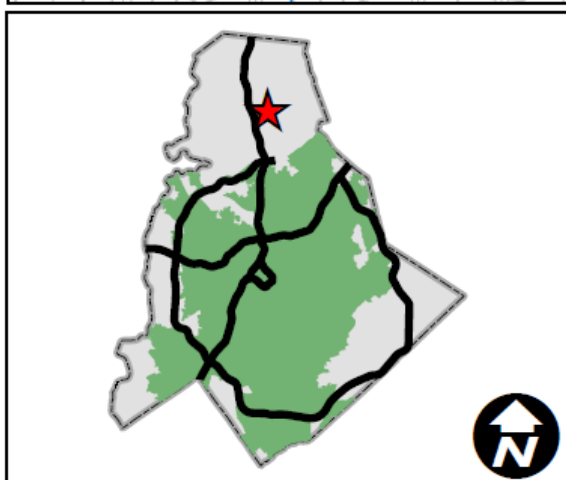
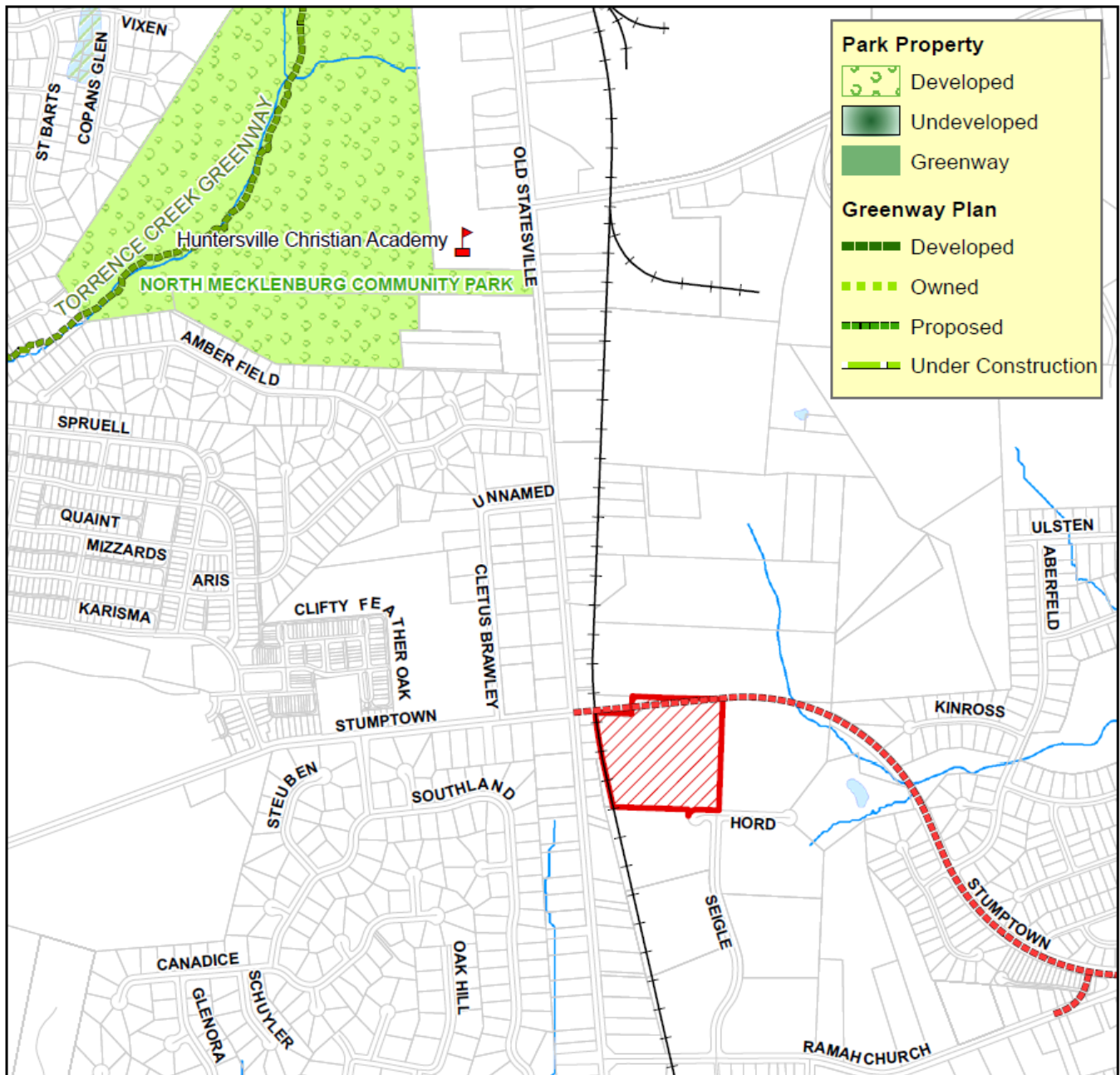
**PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

This project has the potential to be an exciting joint use project. The property is located within the Town of Huntersville's planning jurisdiction. In recognition of Huntersville staff's stated concerns and suggestions, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning staff recommends approval of the acquisition of the property for the intended uses, subject to the following conditions (parentheses indicates the staff identifying the conditions):

- A determination should be made as to which functions (other than CMU) have genuine interest in occupying the site. The site should then be “master planned” to determine if/how these functions can be accommodated on the site, and what (if any) site improvements will be required (Charlotte).
- Proposed site changes are subject to the Town’s Commercial Site Plan requirements (Huntersville).
- Rights-of-way passing across the site for the future Stumptown Road extension and Church Street/Seagle Street (including the future Red Line Trail) should be precisely located and dedicated thereby protecting them from future development so they are available once construction funding becomes available (Huntersville and Charlotte).
- Future site improvements should recognize the location of these future thoroughfares, including but not limited to screening of outdoor storage areas and establishment/protection of setbacks (Huntersville).
- The success of potential “freight-oriented development” (as identified in the Red Line business and finance plan) on parcels east of the property may rely upon rail access across the property in the form of extension of the current rail spur. The importance of this spur to the larger district, and the feasibility of crossing the future Stumptown Road at-grade should both be determined. If necessary, the option to extend the spur in the future if conditions warrant it should be preserved (Huntersville and Charlotte).
- Working with CATS and Norfolk-Southern, rail right-of-way width sufficient to serve anticipated rail needs for the future Red Line should be identified, and that portion of the site thereby identified should be dedicated and protected from development (Charlotte).
- The City should work with the Town of Huntersville and owners of the other properties in the NorthChar business park with a goal of transferring Seagle Street and Hord Drive to the Town of Huntersville for future maintenance (Huntersville).

**CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:**

At its February 21, 2012 meeting the Planning Committee recommended approval of the proposed transactions – subject to the staff-articulated conditions – by a 6-0 vote.



## Mandatory Referral 12-01

Submitted by: City Real Estate

Initiated by: CMU



Mandatory Referral



County Property



Thoroughfare Plan



Produced by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department